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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE AS SANITIZED
2003 23 January 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, WH

SUBJECT : HGG-A-593, HGG-A-594, and DD/P Comments on Cover Sheet

1. In reply to Mr. Wisner's comment, "Just what is ESSENCE talking about. Is he off his rocker, or is there some substance to his statements. If even 50% of what he says is true--then matters are twice as far advanced (favorably) as I have ever heard. What say?", the following should be stated. At the time Mr. Wisner read the attached reports and delivered his comment to you, it was rather difficult to assess the situation. Official comment at that time would probably have been that ESSENCE's reporting was rather unscientific and perhaps represented nothing more than wishful thinking. During the week of 18 January 1954, however, a series of incidents occurred which tend to validate several of the statements made by ESSENCE. Those incidents were as follows:

a. Alfonso Martinez, Chief of the Guatemalan Agrarian Department departed for Switzerland under very peculiar circumstances. To all intents and purposes, he does not intend to return to Guatemala in the near future. In paragraph 1 (b) of HGG-A-593, ESSENCE indicated that Martinez was experiencing considerable difficulty with the Communists in his department and that he was entertaining anti-government thoughts and even planning a break with Arbenz in view of mounting reports that opposition forces are determined to overthrow the government. Martinez' departure, to an extent at least, validates paragraph 1 (b). As to his losing control within the Agrarian Department, this became a reality during the week 11 January. While on a field trip to investigate abuses by squatters, Martinez was mobbed and as a result resigned. This may have been one of the mitigating factors leading to his decision to leave Guatemala.

b. Of related significance to Martinez' difficulty, is the fact that Guillermo Ovando Arriola, President of Congress, Vice President of the Republic, and also Secretary for Agrarian Affairs, was shot by unknown assailants on 20 January while riding in a jeep. There is a strong possibility that his attempted assassination may be directly related to the difficulty within the Department for Agrarian Affairs.

2. As concerns the other remarks made by ESSENCE throughout HGG-A-594, it may be assumed that many of his statements have a degree of validity. However, we do not feel that sufficient supporting information has been received to permit us to deliver a precise comment or evaluation at this time.

JDE/djm

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J. D. ESTERLINE